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February 12, 2016

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February 2016

11

House Armed
Services Subcommittee
on Strategic
Forces Hearing

**"Fiscal Year 2017
Budget Request for
Atomic Energy
Defense Activities"
(2:00 PM)**

Post Register

February 10, 2016

[LINK](#)

Todd Allen, Idaho National Laboratory's deputy director of science and technology since 2013, has left the lab for a position with a Washington, D.C., think tank.

Third Way hired Allen as a senior visiting fellow for one year, the organization announced this week. The self-described centrist think tank has worked closely with INL and federal energy officials in recent years to push the commercialization of advanced reactor designs.

Allen's departure comes as several leadership changes are made by INL Director Mark Peters, who took over the lab's top position in October.

Kelly Beierschmitt, with the lab since 2014, takes over Allen's role as deputy director for science and technology. The other deputy director reporting to Peters remains Juan Alvarez, who oversees lab management and operations.

In a note to employees last month, Peters described the promotion of Beierschmitt and other changes as part of a larger lab leadership reorganization "to ensure alignment with the new vision and future direction of INL."

"The main goal of this leadership structure is to create a culture that fosters even greater creativity and innovation while promoting a work environment that empowers all employees to be productive and safe," Peters wrote.

[Watch Recording.](#)

February 2016

23

Senate Armed Services
Subcommittee on
Strategic Forces
Hearing

***"Department of
Energy Atomic Energy
Defense Activities and
Program"***
(2:30 PM)

[Visit website.](#)

March 2016

03

Senate Energy and
Natural Resources
Hearing

***"Hearing to examine
the Department of
Energy's budget
request for Fiscal Year
2017"***
(10:00 AM)

[Visit website.](#)

Peters said he would be meeting with employees this month to detail new strategies for the lab and further explain the new organization structure.

In an announcement, Third Way said Allen will provide “technical support” on the think tank’s efforts to encourage more research and development investments in new types of reactors.

“I look forward to collaborating with Third Way to help improve nuclear innovation in the United States, both in the federal government and the private sector,” Allen said in a statement.

Obama’s budget request nixes MOX; S.C. sues DOE over missed deadline

Aiken Standard

February 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

After attempting to place the Savannah River Site’s MOX facility in a cold standby two years ago, President Barack Obama is now looking to completely terminate the project and move forward with another plutonium disposal method, beginning in 2017.

Just hours after the budget rollout Tuesday, S.C. Attorney General Alan Wilson announced that he is once again suing the U.S.

Department of Energy and others for missing a key deadline at the MOX facility and for not paying the associated fines of \$1 million a day.

August 2016

9-10

Third Annual
Intermountain
Energy Summit
Idaho Falls, ID

[Visit website.](#)

September 2016

14-15

DOE National Cleanup
Workshop
Hilton Alexandria Mark
Center
Alexandria, VA

[Visit website.](#)

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Regardless of the pathway moving forward, the goal of the nation's plutonium disposition program is to meet an agreement with Russia that states each country must dispose of 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium.

Budget proposal

Obama's fiscal year 2017 budget proposal calls for the termination of the MOX project, which includes the Savannah River Site's Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility.

Released on Tuesday morning, the proposal seeks a "change in plutonium disposition" approach and would appropriate \$285 million to move forward with a downblending alternative.

Specifically, the proposal calls for DOE to "complete pre-conceptual design" for downblending.

Rather than using the SRS facility to transform plutonium into nuclear fuel, downblending would dilute the plutonium and dispose of it at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, or WIPP, in Carlsbad, New Mexico.

The \$285 million in the budget is significantly less than the \$340 million Congress appropriated in December to support construction of the MOX facility.

Obama's plans for MOX has the support of the Energy Department and the National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA – a semi-autonomous group with the Energy Department.

In an email highlighting the budget request, the NNSA describes downblending as a “faster, less expensive path to meeting the U.S. commitment to dispose of excess weapons grade plutonium.”

But MOX advocates, mainly members of the South Carolina congressional delegation, are expected to put up another fight for the program, similar to the one in 2014. Obama's fiscal year 2015 budget request sought to place the MOX project in a cold standby while officials searched for cheaper options.

U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Tim Scott, R-S.C., and U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., used much of the 2014 calendar year advocating for the MOX project and were eventually able to obtain funding for continued construction.

On Tuesday, each of the three congressmen released a statement denouncing Obama's proposal.

Both Graham and Scott referred to the proposal as “reckless,” with Scott adding that the United States can't just terminate the MOX project and walk away from a longstanding international agreement with Russia.

“When we agreed to host the MOX facility in 2000, we agreed that the nuclear material would be processed in state, not just left here indefinitely,” Scott said.

Obama's proposal comes after the Energy Department's 2015 cost projections for the MOX project in which officials said it could cost anywhere from \$800 million to \$1 billion to properly fund MOX on a yearly basis.

Wilson released a "fact sheet" on MOX and name-dropped several other advocates of the project, including former Energy Secretary Bill Richardson. He added that replacing MOX would add to a longstanding assumption that the nation wants to use South Carolina as a nuclear dumping ground.

More on the S.C. lawsuit

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson announced Tuesday that he is suing multiple parties for failing to meet commitments made to the state regarding construction of the Savannah River Site's MOX facility.

Per a 2003 agreement between the state and the Energy Department, the federal agency was supposed to either remove one metric ton of weapons-grade plutonium from the state or process it through the SRS Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility.

Neither occurred, meaning DOE was supposed to pay the state \$1 million a day, capping off at \$100 million annually, beginning Jan. 1, 2016.

The department has failed to do so and has ignored threats made by S.C. Gov. Nikki Haley, according to recent reports from the governor's office.

The attorney general said Tuesday that he filed suit in federal district court “to require the federal government to obey the rule of law.”

The complaint lists the defendants as the Department of Energy, DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz, the National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA, and Frank Klotz, the administrator of the NNSA.

“For the foregoing reasons, the State of South Carolina is entitled to a declaration and order that Defendants’ actions and inactions violate the Constitution and requiring DOE and NNSA to comply with the requirements (of the 2003 agreement),” the attorney general wrote in the complaint.

Following Obama’s 2014 attempt to freeze MOX, the state sued the federal government just two weeks later for attempting to use funds appropriated to construct the SRS facility for shutting the project down.

The suit was eventually dropped after Moniz agreed to continue construction through the remainder of the fiscal year.

Cantwell to White House: Don't cut budget for Hanford cleanup

AP: Komo News

February 10, 2016

[LINK](#)

KENNEWICK, Wash. (AP) - Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington is worried about an Obama administration proposal to reduce the budget for the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

Cantwell on Wednesday told Treasury Secretary Jack Lew that Hanford cleanup needs to be a priority in the budget.

The Tri-City Herald reports Lew testified Wednesday before the Senate Finance Committee.

Cantwell says Hanford is the largest environmental cleanup project in the world and needs continued support.

The administration has proposed a \$190 million budget cut for the Department of Energy Richland Operations Office in fiscal 2017.

But the budget also includes an \$86 million increase for the DOE Office of River Protection, which is responsible for radioactive waste stored in underground tanks.

Hanford board: Spend money on cleanup, not study

Tri-City Herald

February 7, 2016

[LINK](#)

No more money should be diverted from Hanford environmental cleanup to pay for a \$4 million study evaluating risk at the nuclear reservation, according to the Hanford Advisory Board.

The board agreed Thursday at a meeting in Richland that there is insufficient value in continuing the study. Preliminary results, covering about half of the Hanford areas and facilities requiring cleanup, were released Aug. 31 by the Consortium for Risk Evaluation with Stakeholder Participation. CRESP is an independent, multi-university group providing research and assessment to DOE on cleanup work.

“Regardless of why the CRESP report was commissioned, we are concerned that its findings may be used to help justify doing less cleanup at Hanford,” said the letter sent by the board to Monica Regalbuto, the DOE assistant secretary for environmental management.

CRESP officials have said that the review’s identification and characterization of potential risks at Hanford is intended to provide information that will help guide decisions about the order in which remaining cleanup work should be done.

“It’s important to take a step back periodically to assess what is remaining and how to think about the challenges ahead,” said David Kosson, the review’s principal investigator, in a previous discussion about it. Remaining Hanford cleanup is expected to take 50 more years and cost more than \$100 billion.

Among observations in the initial draft released was that cleanup of soil contaminated with highly radioactive cesium and strontium beneath the 324

Building near the Columbia River could be delayed because the spill does not appear to be migrating.

The preliminary analysis looked at contaminated groundwater, underground tanks holding 56 million gallons of radioactive waste and high-risk facilities like the Plutonium and Uranium Extraction facility, better known as PUREX. The second phase of the study, if funded, would include a look at more of the huge chemical processing plants in central Hanford and some waste sites where large amounts of contaminated liquids were dumped into the ground.

“Risks have been known for a long time,” said advisory board member Susan Leckband. She called the study an academic exercise that should not be extended, given its cost.

Members said that good processes already are in place to provide a blueprint for cleanup, including the Tri-Party Agreement and a system of studies followed by “records of decisions.” They are based on extensive scientific analysis, including risk analysis, and public review and input, according to the board.

“Because of the involvement from the state of Washington and Oregon, tribal nations, the Hanford Advisory Board and other stakeholders, we believe the risks related to Hanford cleanup processes are being properly considered in current policies and procedures,” the letter said.

The process should not be circumvented, said board member Pam Larsen.

If all of the \$4 million cost of the study had been available for environmental cleanup, significant progress could have been made, the board said.

The portion of the report written so far covers the most challenging cleanup work remaining at Hanford. The information produced so far is interesting, but it appears unlikely that continuing the study will provide meaningful insights, the board said.

“We do not see a value in spending cleanup dollars to complete this study,” the board told Regalbuto. “The board strongly recommends that you not proceed with the remainder of the project.”

Nuclear pioneer Warren Nyer dies

Post Register

February 9, 2016

[LINK](#)

Warren Nyer, a nuclear pioneer who contributed to the world’s first man-made reactor, died Thursday at his home in Idaho Falls. He was 94.

The cause of death was related to old age, said his son, Michael.

Nyer spent decades living in Idaho Falls and working on major reactor experiments and nuclear programs at what today is known as Idaho National Laboratory.

But he is perhaps best known for his work on the Manhattan Project early on in life.

In 1941, as a young physics student at the University of Chicago, Nyer became involved in the development of Chicago Pile-1 — the world's first nuclear reactor to achieve criticality. CP-1 was a key element of the Manhattan Project, the push to build atomic bombs during World War II.

On that project — not yet having obtained an undergraduate degree — Nyer rubbed elbows with the likes of Enrico Fermi, the Italian physicist who created CP-1, and J. Robert Oppenheimer, considered a father of the atomic bomb.

Nyer is one of the last surviving members of those who had a role in the CP-1 project. Michael Nyer said his father was the last living member of a more select group of roughly 20 scientists who worked directly under Fermi on the project.

On Dec. 2, 1942, Nyer, 21 — the youngest on staff — and several other scientists raised paper cups of Chianti on the University of Chicago's Stagg Field. They celebrated a milestone: the first man-made, self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction.

"He'd tell you the story if you pumped him, but he wouldn't usually bring it up," Michael Nyer said.

After his stint in Chicago, Nyer worked the circuit of the Manhattan Project: Oak Ridge, Tenn., then Hanford, Wash., and Los Alamos, N.M.

In a 2012 Post Register interview, Nyer recalled his time at Los Alamos, where the weapon was assembled.

“I lived 10,000 feet from the testing site; I could feel the heat,” Nyer said. “I could see sunlight on the mushroom cloud.”

In 1951, Nyer moved with his wife and two young sons to Idaho Falls, to take a job at what was then known as the National Reactor Testing Station, established just two years prior. He worked on the Materials Test Reactor, and later headed up nuclear safety programs for the Phillips Petroleum Co., which had a contract at the site.

Michael Nyer said his father enjoyed the eastern Idaho outdoors lifestyle. He hit the ski slopes or hiking trails, from Jackson, Wyo., to Sun Valley, nearly every weekend.

“I’ve always been a fan of science fiction, so (being a part of making science fiction a reality) was a great treat, the whole thing,” Nyer told the Post Register in 2012.

A memorial gathering will be held 2 p.m. Feb. 20 at Wood Funeral Home, 273 N. Ridge Ave., Idaho Falls.